
Congressman Greg Walden's Oregon Congressional Connection

Your Direct Link to the News and Events in the Nation's Capital

Monday, January 28, 2002

Dear Fellow Oregonian:

The second session of the 107th Congress just got underway last week, and we've already gotten off to a productive start by passing an education bill designed to keep federal student loans affordable for the 5.3 million students who depend on them nationwide. Education will remain at the top of the legislative agenda in Congress along with the war on terrorism and providing economic stimulus to jump start our nation's economy. I'm looking forward to tackling many of the most pressing issues facing our nation in the next year, and I'll be sure to keep you updated on the latest developments in Congress.

Before the pace picked up too much in Washington, DC, I took the opportunity last Friday, January 25 to visit the U.S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to tour the facilities housing Taliban and al Qaeda prisoners captured in Afghanistan. The purpose of my trip was twofold: I wanted to meet with the U.S. military personnel at Guantanamo Bay and congratulate them on the outstanding contribution they're making to our national security. I also wanted to tour the facilities being used to hold the detainees we've captured and see for myself whether the recent international criticism of their treatment had any merit.

In this edition of the Oregon Congressional Connection, I've included information about the most recent legislation we've passed in Congress, a post-visit report on my trip to Guantanamo Bay, and wrap-up of the most recent events I participated in during my travels through Oregon's 2nd District. As always, you can find additional information about developments in Congress on my web site at www.walden.house.gov.

If you have any questions or comments about this e-newsletter or anything else taking place in Congress and our nation's capital, please e-mail me at greg.walden@mail.house.gov. My staff and I will get back to you as quickly as possible.

I hope you find this week's Oregon Congressional Connection informative. Thank you.

God Bless America.

Congressman Greg Walden

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District "Wrap Up"

I used the last few days before I returned to the nation's capital last week to visit some of the cities and towns I represent in central Oregon. Below is a list of the places I visited and the nature of the events I attended.

January 14, 2002

Boardman

10:00 to 10:45 AM – I met with officials at the Boardman Park and Recreation District to discuss land transfer issues.

Hermiston

11:45 AM to 1:15 PM – I was the keynote speaker at the 8th Annual Meeting of the Oregon Water Coalition to deliver an update about the water crisis in the Klamath Basin and other water-related issues.

January 17, 2002

Hood River

9:00 to 10:00 AM – I attended an event hosted by Housing for People, Inc. (HOPE), a local non-profit organization that is dedicated to provided housing for low-income Oregonians. The event was held to celebrate HOPE's receipt of a \$285,000 Mutual Self-Help Housing Program Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This money will be used to build 16 low-income homes in the local community. I wrote a letter to the USDA Rural Development office in support of HOPE's grant application.

12:00 to 1:30 PM: I spoke at a lunch meeting of the Hood River Rotary to deliver an update on recent developments in Congress.

6:30 to 9:00 PM: I spoke at the annual Chamber Installation Banquet of the Hood River Chamber of Commerce. As always, the Chamber hosted an outstanding event.

January 21, 2002

Madras

10:15 to 11:00 AM – I met with members of the Warm Springs Tribes to celebrate the signing into law of a bill I introduced in Congress (H.R. 483) to provide federal approval of the use of Warm Springs Tribal trust land and resources for the Tribe's purchase of an interest in the Pelton Hydroelectric Project. I worked closely with the Tribes, local community leaders, and PGE, the prior owner, in this effort. At the meeting I had the honor of presenting to tribal leaders an official copy of the legislation.

Redmond

12:45 to 1:45 PM – I attended a lunch meeting with officials of the Redmond Airport, Redmond community leaders, county commissioners, and local representatives in the Oregon legislature at Redmond Airport. \$1.4 million was provided in this year's Transportation Appropriations Act to fund design and construction costs associated with the expansion of the Roberts Field terminal in Redmond. I requested funding for this project.

Bend

6:00 to 9:00 PM – I attended the annual Gala at the Riverhouse, which is sponsored by the Bend / Central Oregon tourism industry.

Guantanamo Bay Trip

On Friday, January 25, 2002, I traveled to the U.S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba with a U.S. congressional delegation to tour Camp X-Ray, the facility being used to hold prisoners of the U.S. war on terrorism who were captured in Afghanistan. I was accompanied on the trip by my colleague from Oregon, Congressman Peter DeFazio, and 15 other members of the U.S. House.

Currently 158 Taliban and al Qaeda fighters are being housed at Camp X-Ray in temporary units while more secure, permanent detention facilities are being constructed. We were told that these detainees come from 25 different countries, which further underscores to me how widespread terrorism has become. There are also 275 additional prisoners still under U.S. military control in Afghanistan.

The purpose of our trip to Camp X-Ray was to see for ourselves the treatment being afforded to the detainees and speak with the U.S. military personnel in charge of the compound. As you've probably heard, there have been a number of media reports in the last couple of weeks, especially from the European press, questioning whether the treatment of the Taliban and al Qaeda prisoners we're holding in Guantanamo Bay has been in violation of international law.

After touring the facilities at Camp X-Ray, I walked away feeling absolutely confident that these prisoners are being treated humanely. The notion that these Taliban and al Qaeda detainees are in any way being mistreated while in U.S. custody is absolutely absurd and totally false. We're treating them to better food, cleaner water and higher quality healthcare than they would be receiving if they were still in Afghanistan. If anything, the detainees' living spaces are larger and cooler than the tents our men and women in uniform are living in while more permanent quarters are being constructed. I dare say we're treating them far better than the Taliban treated the women of Afghanistan during their rule.

Upon arrival, each detainee receives a basic physical examination by a doctor that includes a chest X-ray and a blood sample. Medical treatment – which is identical to the care provided to our service members at Guantanamo Bay – has been made available for those who need it, including some of the detainees who arrived with battle wounds. We've also gone out of our way to ensure that the prisoners are allowed to worship freely. Copies of the Koran have been given to every detainee, signs have been posted pointing the way to Mecca for their daily prayers, and a Muslim cleric who is a member of the U.S. military has been assigned to the camp to minister to the prisoners and lead them in their prayers. The detainees are also being given three meals a day that comply with Muslim dietary laws.

What really stood out to me during my trip to Guantanamo Bay was the incredible ability of our armed forces to once again step up to this challenge. The decision to house detainees at Camp X-Ray was made over Christmas and New Year's, and five days later they began receiving detainees. Most of our service men and women had just a few days to get there. They're working around the clock to construct detainment, processing and medical care facilities, and the concrete has hardly had a chance to dry. It's difficult to tell if this is a prison in the middle of a construction site, or a construction site in the middle of a prison.

I had the opportunity to meet with Marine Corporal Chris Leach of Tigard, Oregon, while visiting the detention camp. Corporal Leach is assigned to a unit that stands ready to assist guards if the prisoners make any trouble within the compound. I am very proud of Chris and his colleagues – their professionalism and dedication to duty is what makes our armed forces the best in the world. These brave and talented men and women are serving our country well, and the job they're doing to protect their fellow citizens by detaining these terrorists deserves praise, not criticism. I'm glad I got to see it firsthand.

News from Capitol Hill

On Thursday, January 24, 2002, the House approved the final version of S. 1762, a bill to ensure the affordability of federal student loans into the future. I was proud to vote in favor of this bill, which passed the House by a vote of 372 to 3. The Senate passed S.

1762 unanimously in December of 2001, and the bill will now proceed to the President for his signature.

S. 1762 would extend the current student loan interest rate index and fix the interest rate for future student loans at a guaranteed rate of 6.8 percent, which will take effect on July 1, 2006. Under the legislation, the current student loan interest rate index, which now provides the lowest interest rate in the Stafford Loan Program's history, would be extended until the new fixed rate takes effect. Parent loan interest rates would also be fixed at 7.9 percent under the bill.

In these tough economic times it's important for students and their parents to know that interest rates on student loans will be fixed at a guaranteed low rate in the future. This year 5.3 million students across the country accepted federal education loans. For this reason, I'm extremely pleased the Congress has committed itself to guaranteeing the affordability of student loans, which are critical for students in Oregon and across the United States. Helping to offset the high cost of college often makes the difference between students' being able to continue their education and being denied that wonderful opportunity.

For additional information on S. 1762, please visit the following link:

<http://www.gop.gov/committeecentral/docs/bills/107/1/bill.asp?bill=s1762>

Committee Hearings

On Thursday, January 24, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing on the destruction of Enron-related documents by employees of Arthur Andersen, the accounting firm of Enron. While I don't sit on the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, I am a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, which will play a pivotal role in the investigation surrounding the collapse of Enron. I look forward to using my position on the Energy and Commerce Committee to do everything I can to get to the bottom of the Enron case, especially when it comes to identifying any wrongdoing by Enron or Arthur Andersen employees.

If you're interested in following the Enron investigation as it unfolds in the Energy and Commerce Committee, I encourage you to visit the committee's web site at:

<http://energycommerce.house.gov>.

On the House Floor – All Times Pacific

On Monday, January 28, the House was not in session. On Tuesday, January 29, the House will meet at 9:30 AM for morning hour and 11:00 AM for legislative business. The House will not be in session on Wednesday, January 30 and Thursday, January 31, while lawmakers attend a congressional retreat to discuss issues that will be on the

forefront of the national agenda in the coming years. On Friday, February 1, the House will meet at 7:00 AM in pro forma session.

State of the Union Speech

President George W. Bush will address a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, January 29, to deliver an update on the State of the Union. The President's speech will be broadcast live on most television news channels, beginning at 6:00 PM (PST).

Online Survey on www.walden.house.gov

In order to keep abreast of the issues that matter most to Oregonians, I've added a new online survey to my web site at www.walden.house.gov. If you have not already done so, I hope you'll take a moment to register your positions. And please tell your friends, family and coworkers about the new survey and encourage them to fill it out.

My survey asks Oregonians their opinions on a variety of local and national issues, including the war on terrorism, education reform, efforts to stimulate the economy, and the federal government's natural resource policies. Keeping informed about the positions of the people I represent in Congress is critical to my being able to serve them effectively.

My web site also contains a year-end congressional report to taxpayers in Oregon, regular updates on the Klamath Basin crisis, and other developments in Congress.

Sending mail to Capitol Hill

Regular U.S. mail delivery to my congressional office in Washington, D.C. continues to be slow and unreliable. While I was advised that mail delivery would resume in late November of 2001, the process of irradiating incoming mail to protect against bio-terrorism continues to cause lengthy delays. As a result, I have not been able to respond to a number of Oregonians who have contacted me via regular mail since early October.

Until an efficient reliable means of delivering regular mail to congressional offices is established, I encourage you to communicate with me in Washington, D.C., by fax at (202) 225-5774 and by email at greg.walden@mail.house.gov. You can also send U.S. mail to my district offices in Medford and Bend at the addresses below. My district staff keeps me closely apprised of the mail I receive when I'm not in Oregon.

Medford District Office
843 East Main Street
Suite 400
Medford, OR 97504

Bend District Office
Jamison Building
Suite 211
131 NW Hawthorne
Bend, OR 97701

Second District Trivia

This week's question: What is Oregon's state motto? Bonus question: what does it mean?

For the answer to this question and to take a crack at past questions, click here:

<http://www.walden.house.gov/trivia/trivia.htm>

For more information on these and other issues, please visit my website at www.walden.house.gov or call my Washington, D.C., office at (202) 225-6730. You can also call my Medford office toll-free at (800) 533-3033. If you have any questions or comments, please send them to dallas.boyd@mail.house.gov. If you'd like to be removed from the "Oregon Congressional Connection" list simply send an email to newsletter-request@or02list.house.gov and type UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject line.